

# GEARED FOR SUCCESS



# WE CAN



## THE OFFICE OF THE CHILDREN'S ADVOCATE

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Children's  
Advocate

# MANITOBA OFFICE OF THE CHILDREN'S ADVOCATE ANNUAL REPORT

## 2012 - 2013

April 1, 2012 – March 31, 2013



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# ABOUT

## THE OFFICE OF THE CHILDREN'S ADVOCATE



### Vision Statement

A safe and healthy society that hears, includes, values and protects all children and youth.

### Mission Statement

To ensure the voices of children and youth involved with the child welfare system are heard. As an independent office, we advocate for systemic changes for the benefit of children and youth under *The Child and Family Services Act* and *The Adoption Act*.

### What We Do

The Office of the Children's Advocate is an independent office of the Manitoba Legislative Assembly. We are here to represent the rights, interests and viewpoints of children and youth throughout Manitoba who are receiving, or are entitled to be receiving, services under *The Child and Family Services Act* and *The Adoption Act*. We do this by advocating directly with children and youth, or on their behalf with caregivers and other stakeholders. Our advocacy also involves reviewing services after the death of any young person where that young person or their family was involved with child welfare in the year preceding the death.

The Children's Advocate is empowered to review, investigate, and provide recommendations on matters relating to the welfare and interests of these children and youth.

We also promote the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* (UNCRC). This guiding

document, which Canada ratified in 1991, describes more than 40 central human rights specific to children.

### Guided by Best Interests

We carry out our role according to the best interests provisions of both *The Child and Family Services Act* and *The Adoption Act*. This means that in all of the activities carried out by the staff of the Office of the Children's Advocate, the best interests and safety of the young person are our top consideration.

### The Importance of Having an Independent Children's Advocate

The independent status of the Office of the Children's Advocate is vital. It allows the Children's Advocate to freely challenge the system and work for change to practices, policies, or legislation when they are not meeting the best interests of children and youth.

"Independent" means that the government of Manitoba does not oversee the Office of the Children's Advocate. We are separate and apart from the child welfare system; we are not a child welfare agency.

Children are in particular need of advocates. They have a voice but virtually no legal power to make anyone listen to them. Our experiences speaking with children and youth in the child welfare system reveal that they sometimes feel they have no say in what happens to them.

# GEARED FOR SUCCESS



*In accordance with Section 8.2 (1) (d) of The Child and Family Services Act, I respectfully submit this document as my annual report for the time period beginning April 1, 2012 to March 31, 2013.*

We all want what is best for our children. We want them to be safe and protected and to grow into happy, healthy adults who make a contribution to our community. To achieve this end in an increasingly complex and rapidly changing world, the many parts of our society with the responsibility to care for and influence our children need to work together. It's similar to a well-crafted timepiece; the gears must fit together precisely in order to move the hands forward.

From the vantage point of our office, it's clear that to support the well-being of our children, we need to improve the way we all work together.

When it comes to caring about our children, many formal and informal bodies are involved. Those working in the education, justice, child welfare and health care systems as well as parents, extended family, foster parents, elders, and other community members all have important roles to play.

What's often missing in the situations our office becomes aware of are the cooperative connections needed between these bodies to make sure children and youth have what they need to succeed. In other words, the cogs of the gears sometimes don't mesh together the way they should. Consequently, families struggle and children and youth become at risk.

There can be obstacles to making the parts fit together better. They include community and individual isolation, mistrust, protocols that hamper communication that would benefit the best interests of children, and a belief that someone else should be responsible for action.

Yet we've seen many instances where the gears are moving smoothly—where there are strong interconnections between formal and informal networks that work together to uphold the rights and meet the best interests of the child. You will see examples of these effective working relationships in the pages of this report. The challenge for all of us is to examine what makes it work in these situations and then to foster more of the same. We must view the safety and positive development of all children and youth as a collective responsibility.



**Darlene MacDonald, MSW**  
Children's Advocate



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The **OCA**: Ensuring the voices of children and youth involved with the child welfare system are heard.



Children's Advocate  
**Darlene MacDonald**

THEME OF THIS YEAR'S ANNUAL REPORT:

## GEARED FOR SUCCESS

When it comes to the safety and well-being of our children, the many parts of our society with the responsibility to care for and influence our children need to work together. Similar to a well-crafted timepiece; the gears must fit together precisely in order to move the hands forward. Children and youth are a collective responsibility.

### ACTIVITY HIGHLIGHTS

- Released the Youth with Complex Needs report, which examined young people who face multiple issues and the challenges of meeting their needs.
- Facilitated a focus group with older youth in care to better understand their perspective of the child welfare system.
- Welcomed a new deputy children's advocate, Corey La Berge.
- Developed and signed a memorandum of understanding between members of the Canadian Council of Child and Youth Advocates (CCCYA) regarding advocacy support to children, youth, and families moving between provinces.
- Expanded our online presence to include the social networks Facebook and Twitter.
- Connected with 141 residential facilities for children in care to provide rights and advocacy information. Also made 29 public education presentations and hosted a block party to raise awareness of children's rights during Winnipeg's Santa Claus Parade.
- Organized a 2-day UNICEF training session for service providers aimed at developing local champions of children's rights.



## SERVICE STATS

### ADVOCACY SERVICES

**2,172** Total Cases opened

**2,158** Total Cases closed

**221** Total Cases carried forward

### SPECIAL INVESTIGATION REVIEW SERVICES

**64** Child death cases opened

**89** Investigations and reviews completed

**58** Cases carried forward

## THEMES & RECOMMENDATIONS



### Assessing Risk

The OCA continues to see cases where adequate risk assessments are not being completed. There have been improvements to training in this area in recent years, but on-the-job mentoring needs to support this on the frontline. The computer system used to track and record involvement with families must also be improved to assist with risk assessment.



### Case Planning and Service Delivery

We see a need for improvement in the completion of case plans that relate directly to the issues families are facing. Frequently, regular reviews of these plans have not been completed in the cases that come to our attention. In some situations, clearly needed

resources are not identified in the case plan or are not readily available, compromising service delivery.



### Youth Suicide

An emerging pattern of suicides that now includes a greater proportion of girls, an increasing trend toward strangulation, and possibly a younger demographic points to the need to develop new prevention strategies that address these changes.



### Housing and Homelessness

Adequate housing has a direct relationship to the well-being of children and their families. Over the past year, housing and homelessness has emerged as a growing issue for the families we have seen.

## Shout out from the OCA!

- Happy birthday and thank you to VOICES: Manitoba's Youth in Care Network, which celebrated 18 years of "being there" for children and youth in and from care.
- Big applause to Winnipeg Technical College, Red River College, Brandon University, and Assiniboine Community College for joining the University of Winnipeg in waiving tuition costs for youth in care.



# SOMMAIRE

Le BPE : S'assure que les voix des enfants et des jeunes impliqués dans le réseau de protection de l'enfance soient entendues.



Protecteur des enfants  
**Darlene MacDonald**

THÈME DU RAPPORT ANNUEL DE CETTE ANNÉE :

## VERS LE SUCCÈS

Lorsqu'il s'agit de la sécurité et du bien-être de nos enfants, les nombreuses parties de notre société qui ont la responsabilité de prendre soin et d'influencer nos enfant doivent travailler de concert. De façon similaire à un garde-temps soigné, les engrenages doivent s'ajuster précisément les uns aux autres de façon à faire avancer les aiguilles. Les enfants et les jeunes sont une responsabilité collective.

### ACTIVITÉS PRINCIPALES

- Publié le rapport *Youth with Complex Needs*, qui examine les jeunes qui font face à des questions multiples et les défis de répondre à leurs besoins.
- Animé un groupe de discussion avec les jeunes plus âgés, sous soins, afin de mieux comprendre leur point de vue du réseau de protection de l'enfance.
- Accueilli un nouveau protecteur des enfants adjoint, Corey La Berge.
- Conçu et signé un protocole d'entente entre les membres du *Canadian Council of Child and Youth Advocates* (CCCYA) en ce qui a trait au soutien de la protection des enfants, des jeunes et des familles qui se déplacent entre les provinces.
- Agrandi notre présence en ligne pour inclure les réseaux sociaux Facebook et Twitter.
- Établi des liens avec 141 établissements résidentiels pour enfants sous soins afin de fournir des renseignements sur les droits et la protection. Avons aussi fait 29 présentations d'éducation publiques et organisé une fête de quartier pour sensibiliser les gens aux droits des enfants au cours du défilé du Père Noël.
- Organisé une session de formation UNICEF de deux jours pour les prestataires de service dans le but de faire ressortir des champions locaux des droits des enfants.



Agrandi notre présence en ligne



Fête de quartier lors du défilé du Père Noël

# STATISTIQUES DE SERVICES

## SERVICES DE PROTECTION

**2 172** Dossiers ouverts

**2 158** Dossiers fermés

**221** Dossiers reportés

## SERVICES DES RÉVISIONS D'ENQUÊTE SPÉCIALE

**64** Dossiers de décès d'enfant ouverts

**89** Enquêtes et révisions complétées

**58** Dossiers reportés

## THÈMES ET RECOMMANDATIONS



### Évaluation du risque

Le BPE continue de voir des cas où les évaluations adéquates du risque ne sont pas complétées. Il y a eu des améliorations de la formation dans ce secteur au cours des dernières années, mais le mentorat en milieu de travail doit soutenir cette approche en première ligne. Le système d'ordinateur utilisé pour faire le suivi et enregistrer les implications avec les familles doit aussi être amélioré pour aider à l'évaluation du risque.



### Planification de cas et prestation de service

Nous voyons un besoin d'amélioration dans l'achèvement des plans de cas qui sont directement liés aux problèmes que rencontrent les familles. Fréquemment, les révisions régulières de ces plans n'ont pas été complétées, dans les cas qui sont portés à notre attention. Dans certaines

situations, des ressources clairement nécessaires ne sont pas identifiées dans le plan de cas ou ne sont pas facilement disponibles, compromettant la prestation de service.



### Suicide de jeune

Une tendance croissante de suicides qui comprend maintenant une plus grande proportion de filles, une tendance à la hausse vers l'étranglement, et possiblement une moyenne d'âge inférieure indique le besoin d'élaborer de nouvelles stratégies de prévention qui reflètent ces changements.



### Logement et l'itinérance

Le logement adéquat a un lien direct au bien-être des enfants et de leurs familles. Au cours de la dernière année, le logement et l'itinérance ont émergé comme problème croissant pour les familles que nous avons rencontrées.

## Haut et fort du Protecteur !

- Bon anniversaire et merci à VOICES : le réseau de jeunes sous soins du Manitoba, qui a célébré 18 ans de « présence » pour les enfants et les jeunes sous soins ou issus de cette situation.
- Tonnerre d'applaudissements aux Winnipeg Technical College, Red River College, Brandon University, et Assiniboine Community College qui se sont joints à l'Université de Winnipeg pour renoncer aux frais de scolarité pour les jeunes sous soins.



# OVERVIEW

## OF INITIATIVES & ACTIVITIES



### YOUTH WITH COMPLEX NEEDS REPORT

In March 2012, we released a special report looking at the needs of young people who face multiple issues such as developmental delays, cognitive challenges, mental health issues, and/or conflicts with the law. The report found that 25% - 30% of youth in care age 13-17 have multiple complex needs. These young people need a wide range of intensive services that go beyond the child welfare system.

Those interviewed for this report indicated that although there are many dedicated individuals who provide quality services to youth with complex needs, current system challenges undermine their efforts. These challenges include fragmentation, service gaps, and lack of coordination among sectors providing various services. One such example discussed in the report is the vital interconnection of child welfare and education. Youth with complex needs can face difficulties in school as a result of behaviours associated with their needs. Suspensions or expulsions can disrupt the child and the stakeholders alike and create additional challenges in re-entry. The report describes the need for the child welfare and education systems to work more closely in order to better share information, identify resources, and improve each system's ability to respond to the needs of youth with complex needs (p. 101-102). As one respondent commented in interviews, "We all need to be on the same page in order to provide seamless services" (p. 103).

Recommendations in the report include the following:

- Prioritization of trauma services to address the adverse childhood experiences of many of these youth, which impact their ability to develop and succeed.
- Increased focus on early intervention, which can improve outcomes.
- Improvements in the ability to assess young people, recognizing that there are critical opportunities for intervention at times of transition.
- Promotion of a climate within the system that encourages innovation and non-traditional approaches to meeting the diverse needs of this population.
- A collaborative planning process by Manitoba Family Services that involves key representatives from child welfare, residential care, mental health, youth justice, education and others to develop a comprehensive multi-year strategy to enhance services and supports to these children and youth.

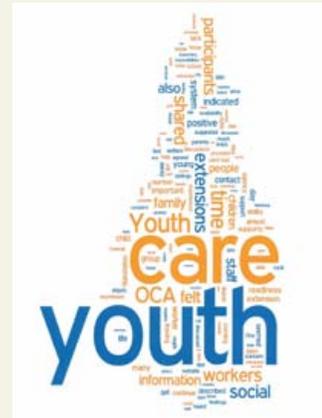
This special report has been presented to a number of bodies, including the Healthy Child Committee of Cabinet and a Manitoba Education sub-committee. Additional conference presentations are scheduled for 2013-2014.

You can find the full report on the OCA website in the special reports section under "resources" on the homepage menu.

# TRANSITIONING OUT OF CARE

In our continuing effort to engage youth transitioning out of care, we designed and facilitated a focus group with older youth in care in order to better understand their perspective of the system. Topics included issues such as preparation for independence, cultural and family considerations, extensions of care as well as the accessibility of the OCA.

Participating youth, the CFS authorities, the Child Protection Branch, and several other stakeholders, received a copy of the final focus group report. You can find the full report on the OCA website in the special reports section under “resources” on the homepage menu.



# OUR DREAMS MATTER TOO

Children and youth living on Manitoba First Nations reserves have less access to important health and social services than others in our province due to disparities between provincial and federal government funding. In June, the OCA wrote several letters in support of the “Our Dreams Matter Too” campaign initiated by the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada (FNCFCS). Our office also supports the Assembly of First Nations and the FNCFCS’ challenge regarding the level of federal funding for children living on reserve currently before the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal.



Follow the campaign on Twitter at #iamawitness

## Deputy Children’s Advocate



We said farewell to Deputy Children’s Advocate Bonnie Kocsis in June, who left to take a position as executive director of Animikii Ozoson Child and Family Services. Bonnie joined the OCA in 2005, and was a dedicated champion of the rights of children. We are confident she will continue to make a significant contribution to child welfare in her new position.

In January, we welcomed Corey La Berge as our new deputy. Corey has held teaching and research appointments at Simon Fraser University, the University of Victoria, and the University of Manitoba. He has conducted research on the barriers that exist for persons with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD). After becoming aware of the challenges for persons with FASD, Corey returned to university and earned a law degree.

Since then he has championed the rights and best interests of children and youth within the legal system as legal counsel and as a vigorous advocate for better resources for young people involved in the justice system.



He has acted as a consultant and provided leadership with respect to the development of a spectrum of initiatives to improve the ways in which public systems respond to the unique and changing needs of young people. Corey is well-respected at the local, provincial, and national level and most important, he is trusted by the young people with whom he has worked over the years.

## Phoenix Sinclair Inquiry

In 2006, following the discovery of the death of five-year old Phoenix, our office completed four reports related to child welfare and the circumstances and context of Phoenix's life and her tragic death. In 2012, when the provincial inquiry began, those reports were included in the terms of reference for the inquiry's commission. We also submitted additional documents requested by the inquiry's commissioner. The additional information included analysis of the issues, themes, and challenges our office sees in our ongoing work with children and youth across Manitoba.

The public hearings that began in September 2012 were divided into three distinct phases. Phase I focused on factual evidence specifically related to the child welfare service provision to Phoenix and her family. Phase II of the hearings examined changes that have occurred in the child welfare system since Phoenix's death. Phase III explored the larger systemic needs and responsibilities of the community and identified strategies or recommendations to address these underlying issues.

In keeping with the OCA's mandate to conduct systemic advocacy, a senior OCA staff member attended Phase II and Phase III of the public hearings. Our intention was to observe and gather data in order to identify emerging themes. Based on this information and our ongoing work with families receiving child welfare services in the province, our office will be better able to identify potential systemic findings or recommendations that may come forward in Commissioner Hughes' final report.

## Staying Informed

James Wilson, commissioner of the Treaty Relations Commission of Manitoba, provided an in-house training and information session to OCA staff in February to enhance understanding of the significance of the treaty relationship for Aboriginal communities in our province.

OCA staff also participated in a training session with PART Canada (Practice and Research Together), a Canadian membership-based research utilization initiative that promotes evidence-informed child welfare practice. PART membership allows us to access an extensive library of research-based tools including journal articles, in-house trainings, webinars and guide-books. These additional resources will aid our commitment to ensuring our investigations and reports are grounded in proven best practices and emerging methodologies.



## LOOKING FOR RESOURCES?

The OCA produces several publications on issues related to children and youth and their experiences with child welfare. We list all of the materials available in the “resources” section of our website. Download them, or contact us to request items.



## GROWING THE FUTURE

We continued our strategic planning process for the OCA this year, which resulted in identifying a number of short- and long-term goals. Some of our priorities include the following:

- Prioritize services to, and engagement of, children ages birth -12 years.
- Increase rights education efforts for youth.
- Continue to support and advocate for youth transitioning out of care.
- Increase our presence in northern communities.
- Educate the public on the impact of adverse childhood events.
- Continue to develop collaborative relationships with agencies, authorities, and communities across the province.
- Continue to advocate for improved reunification planning for children and youth who may be returning home from care.

## CCCYA Activities

We continued our active participation with the Canadian Council of Child and Youth Advocates (CCCYA). This included making a significant contribution, along with the Child Welfare League of Canada, to a national report on youth transitioning from care, scheduled for publication in 2013.

Our office signed a memorandum of understanding in 2013 between CCCYA members regarding the framework developed last year to address advocacy support to children, youth, and families moving between provinces.

## Wards of the Crown

Award-winning filmmaker, Andrée Cazabon, approached our office for support in her efforts to update her documentary, *Wards of the Crown*, which explored the issues faced by Canadian youth in care. Produced in 2005, this film has become a standard child welfare teaching tool. The OCA committed funds towards the film’s next chapter, which will focus on outcomes for youth involved in the child welfare system, and include specialized information and resources from a Manitoba perspective.

## GETTING SOCIAL



This year, we expanded our online presence to include social networks. We are now using Facebook and Twitter to highlight issues, trends and emerging research in child welfare. These platforms also allow us to promote the rights of children and youth and to foster relationships with those interested in our work.

Find us on Twitter @**OCAAdvocate** and on Facebook at **Facebook.com/OCAAdvocate**.

We made 29 public education presentations to community groups and organizations this year. We've had a lot of positive feedback on our revised presentation format. Contact us if you'd like the OCA to deliver a presentation to your group.



## Facility Visits

This year, we were able to identify a total of 141 residential facilities for children in care throughout Manitoba. The OCA connects with many facilities throughout the year in order to provide rights education and advocacy services information to both the young people residing in these facilities and to their care providers. Advocacy officers were successful in contacting each facility including 116 in-person visits.

## The Drop – Youth Newsletter

Based on feedback from youth, stakeholders, and staff, we made the decision to produce a quarterly youth-focused publication. Each edition of *The Drop* focuses on a specific article of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. The first issue explored article 16, which pertains to the right to privacy. This issue was so popular we had to order another print run to keep up with the demand. Back issues of this newsletter are available on the OCA website.

## Hope Rising – Suicide Prevention Newsletter for Youth

The OCA's suicide prevention newsletter got a makeover this year including a new name. It is now published in English under the name, "Hope Rising." It is also available in Cree ("Aspénimowina Pasikonamowin"), and Ojibwe ("Bagosendamang"). All versions are available in print and digital download from our website. The newsletter aims to increase awareness and dialogue about suicide prevention throughout the province.

The demand for this resource has grown tremendously. We are examining options to increase print distribution to respond to these requests.

# CHILD RIGHTS

United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child  
Article 17  
You have the right to get information from the media.



# CHILD RIGHTS AWARENESS WEEK

Our office used two separate events this year to promote Child Rights Awareness Week, November 18-24.

Partnering with several stakeholder groups made it possible to bring UNICEF's *Children's Rights Training for Advocacy Professionals* to Winnipeg. This 2-day training supports the development of local advocates for children and youth who are knowledgeable and focused on the rights of young people. Thirty professionals from sponsoring organizations participated in the training, which supports systemic, case, and individual advocacy as well as policy activities.

Participating sponsors included the following:

- Office of the Manitoba Ombudsman
- Manitoba Human Rights Commission
- Metis Child and Family Services Authority
- General Child and Family Services Authority
- Southern First Nations Network of Care
- VOICES: Manitoba's Youth in Care Network

Also in recognition of Child Rights Awareness Week, we hosted a block party the afternoon of the Santa Claus Parade. The parade's route passing the OCA building made this an ideal occasion to promote children's rights and educate the public on the role of our office.



We invited 200 children and their caregivers to join us on bleacher-style seating for the party and parade and welcomed thousands more who travelled downtown for this huge annual Winnipeg event. The block party featured dance performances, games and activities for kids, prizes, and giveaways. In addition to a great group of community volunteers, our partners and supporters for this event included VOICES: Manitoba's Youth in Care Network, Aboriginal Youth Opportunities, Manitoba Hydro, Streetz 104.7 FM, Recycle MB, the Aboriginal School of Dance, Manitoba Foster Family Network, Emergency Placement Resources, Aboriginal Peoples Television Network and Perth's Drycleaners.

## In the Community

OCA team members attend and support many community events related to our mandate. Examples of some of those events from this year include the following:

- Michif Child and Family Services open house to celebrate this new agency for children, youth and their families.
- Meet Me @ The Bell Tower rallies to support community development, violence prevention and the continued positive impact of youth-led organizations in Winnipeg's North End.
- Numerous powwows and other community events.
- Multiple annual general meetings, age of majority celebrations, open houses, and feasts.



## SHOUT OUT FROM THE ADVOCATE

### Focus Group Participants

We appreciate the contributions of the dozen youth, 15-years of age and older who shared their stories with us about their time in care. Thank you!

### Happy Birthday!

**VOICES:** Manitoba's Youth in Care Network celebrated 18 years in operation in 2013. Congratulations and thank you for being there for children and youth in and from care.

### Help for Students in Care

Additional post-secondary institutions came on board this year to waive tuition costs for youth in care, helping to remove a significant barrier to education for these students. We applaud Winnipeg Technical College, Red River College, Brandon University, and Assiniboine Community College, which join the University of Winnipeg, in recognizing that youth who have been in care represent a group who often require unique supports to develop to their full potential.

We hope to see all post-secondary schools in Manitoba make similar declarations of support for young people in and from the child welfare system.



## ADVOCACY SERVICES STATISTICS

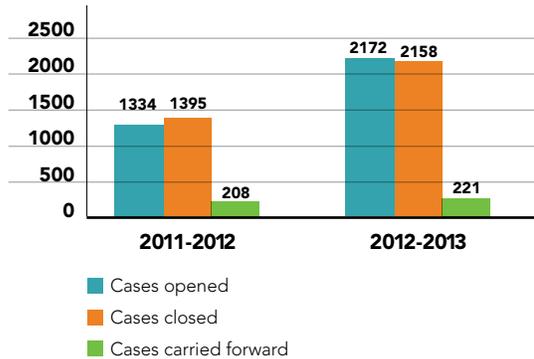
In 2012-2013, the OCA received a total of 2,647 requests for service.

Compared with last fiscal year, we received 265 more service requests in 2012-2013.

This is an increase of 11%.

Requests for advocacy services cover a wide range of activities. These may include reviewing child welfare involvement, establishing contact with the appropriate CFS agency, meeting with children and youth to help them understand the decisions being made by stakeholders in their care plan, and attending meetings to provide direct advocacy support for a child or youth. More complex cases might include matters where the issues identified are multi-dimensional and/or there are a lack of community/family resources to meet the identified needs. We've been involved in cases when there are significant interpersonal or environmental breakdowns that require intervention by one or more service providers.

When we become aware of emerging trends in the types of concerns requiring advocacy, we analyze and address those concerns to see if there are systemic issues at play. This may result in systemic advocacy work and special reports.



Note: Not all requests for service result in a case opening.

### Cases Opened

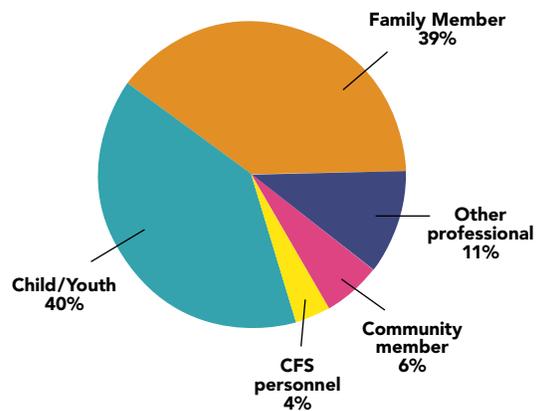
A file opening does not denote the number of children served or reflect the complexity of the case. For example, when we have contact with a sibling group only one file is opened under the name of the oldest sibling, even though advocacy services may be provided to each or several of the children.

In 2012-2013, there was a 9% overall increase in case files opened and a 6% overall increase in the number of case files closed. A key issue we are observing is that the issues involved in the cases being referred for advocacy intervention are becoming more complex, often involving multiple systems, and requiring a longer time to resolve.

### Who contacted the OCA for Advocacy Services

This year marked the largest increase of children and youth contacting the OCA in our 10-year history. We had 358 children and youth contact us this year compared with 213 in 2011-2012. This represents a 68% increase, or an additional 145 children and youth accessing our services directly.

The following chart illustrates that our largest referral base is almost equally split between children and youth, and family members.



Although individuals primarily make contact with our office by phone, we've seen an increase in the number of in-person requests for service as well as website-initiated requests. Eighteen percent (472) of service requests were the result of in-person visits to our office as compared with 15% (350) last fiscal year.

### YOUTH STORY

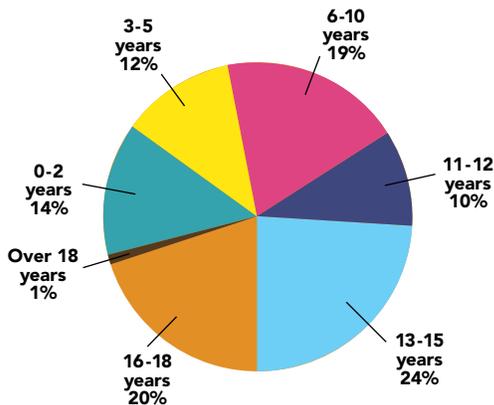
A youth called our office requesting advocacy services because she was unhappy being moved from her group home placement. She requested our support to help her understand the agency's plan for her and to feel that the agency was hearing her voice as they made decisions about her care. Our staff worked with the youth and the various service providers involved. Through this process, it became clear that the placement change was indeed in the best interests of the youth and that the agency's current plan for her better addressed her needs. As a result of the agency's support for her and their commitment to identifying needed resources, the youth was able to address many of her challenges, began attending school consistently, became involved with positive peer-support groups, and is actively working to continue to heal from the effects of trauma she experienced as a child.

Service requests via the OCA website represent the fastest growing method of contact. This year, we saw 115 website-initiated requests.

## The Children and Youth We Serve

This year, we opened more advocacy cases involving females (61%) than males (39%).

### AGE OF CHILD OR YOUTH



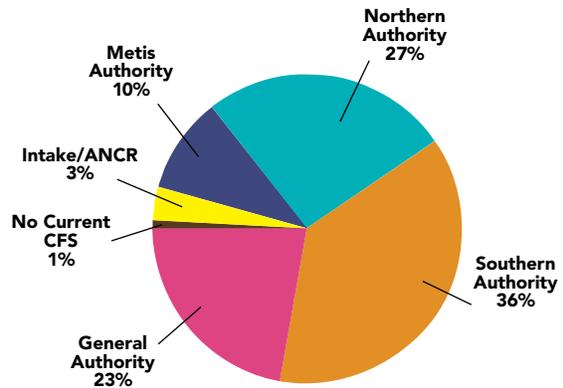
We have seen an increase in requests for services from young adults aged 18-21 years. In each of the two previous years (2010-2012), we had 28 cases in this age category. In 2012-2013, we received 56 requests from 18-21 year olds, representing a 100% increase.

### CHILDREN IN CARE

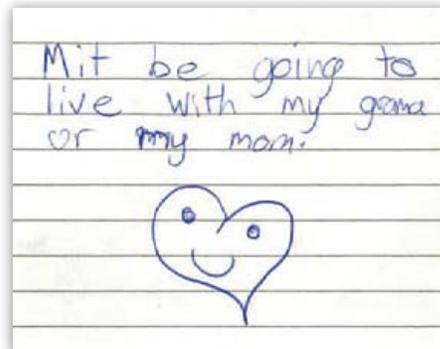
The number of children in care in Manitoba continues to increase steadily. This year, there were 9,730 children and youth in care, up from 9,432 last year. As a proportion of the total population of children and youth in the province, this represents a .08% increase.



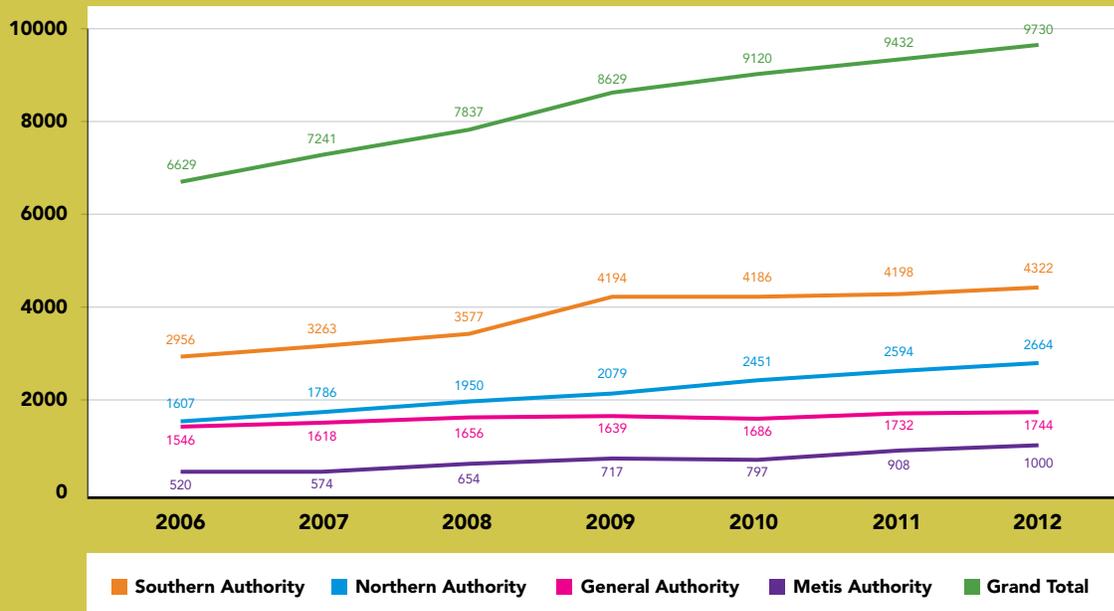
### RESPONSIBLE CFS AUTHORITY



Across Canada, there is an overrepresentation of Aboriginal children and youth involved with the child welfare system due to historic and systemic reasons. It is, therefore, not surprising to see a similar overrepresentation in OCA statistics. Seventy-four percent of the children and youth who received advocacy intervention this year are Aboriginal.



## CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES Children in Care in Manitoba 2006-2012



1. Data as reported in the Family Services and Labour annual report provides the total number of children in care as of March 31 each year.
2. Numbers include:
  - a. Children in care in Manitoba
  - b. Children in care in other provinces but supervised by Manitoba agencies
  - c. Young adults in receipt of service beyond their 18th birthday via extensions of care and maintenance agreements

## TOP CFS RELATED CONCERNS BY CATEGORY

Each advocacy case may include multiple concerns. Last year, we saw a shift in the top reported concern from case planning to issues related to child rights. This trend continued in 2012-2013.

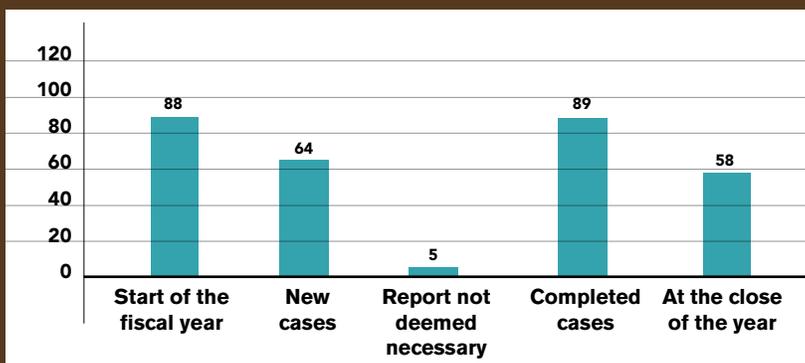
Top Issue	Number	Percentage
Rights (e.g., provision, prevention, protection, participation)	744	30.0%
Case plans	712	29.0%
Quality of care (applies to children in care only)	458	18.5%
Responsiveness/timeliness (e.g., administrative or service delays, over-responsive, unresponsive)	172	7.0%
Accessibility (e.g., ineligibility, lack of service, refusal of service, resource limitation, lack of information)	99	4.0%
Transitional planning	97	4.0%
Child maltreatment	77	3.0%
Other (i.e., concerns that do not fit under established categories)	64	2.5%
Accountability (e.g., conflict of interest, fear of system, inadequate review, inappropriate worker conduct)	33	1.0%
Special/complex needs (e.g., funding, jurisdiction, service coordination, lack of resources)	17	1.0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>2473</b>	<b>100%</b>

# SPECIAL INVESTIGATION REVIEW STATISTICS



The Special Investigation Review (SIR) program began the 2012-2013 fiscal year with a total of 88 outstanding cases. Five of those cases did not qualify for review, leaving 83. During the year, we were notified of 162 Manitoba child deaths, with 64 of those deaths meeting the criteria for an investigation or review. We completed an investigation or review on 89 of our open cases, leaving 58 to carry over to the next year.

## Special Investigation Review Cases 2012-2013



## Types of SIR Reports

The depth of the review of services depends on the circumstances of the death and the nature of the services that have been provided to the child or family. In some cases we conduct a full review of services that were, or ought to have been provided, and which may include a review of publicly funded services such as mental health and addiction treatment. We may make recommendations to enhance child safety and well-being and to reduce the likelihood of a death occurring in similar circumstances.

In other cases, such as natural or expected deaths of children due to medical issues, our review process may be less intensive. This type of review would outline the circumstances of the death and present a brief summary of the CFS involvement with the deceased child and/or the child's family. It may also include recommendations.

On occasion, we observe that certain issues are common to multiple children who have died. Therefore, we sometimes find it helpful to group several deaths together into an aggregate report to address systemic issues.

## SPECIAL INVESTIGATION REVIEW RECOMMENDATIONS

The OCA is in a unique position that enables us to comment on issues that span the province and relate to the child welfare system as a whole. It is critical that the various components of Manitoba's large child welfare system continually engage in self-evaluation and improvement due to the extensive impact the system has on children, families and communities. Examining these issues across the system allows us to make a systemic case for needed changes.

We undertook three aggregate reports this year involving 16 children. In one, we reviewed six cases involving youth who died by homicide. It addressed the services provided by five agencies under three CFS authorities. The two other aggregates focused on youth who died by suicide. One involved five youth from communities served by a particular agency, who died by suicide between 2009 and 2012. It also examined the services provided within the geographic area of the agency's jurisdiction. The other aggregate examined services provided to five youth living in a single community who died by suicide between 2009 and 2011.

As our office nears completion of a review or an investigation of a child's death, we invite the involved agencies and their overseeing authorities to discuss our findings and provide information and feedback to our office as we structure final recommendations. This collaboration allows us to have a more complete picture of any work the CFS agency or authority is already undertaking that addresses the findings of our investigation and allows us to set more realistic and achievable calls for service improvements.

This year, 28 of our investigations included recommendations. We made a total of 69 recommendations to agencies, their authorities and the Child Protection Branch. We made three additional recommendations to Manitoba Housing related to housing regulations.

Consistent with last year's findings, top concerns in 2012-2013 were frequently related to risk assessment, as well as case coordination between stakeholders.

We also record positive findings investigators have noted in reports. In total, positive findings were recorded 19 times. We saw a number of examples of exceptional work and cooperation between agencies, which resulted in a high quality of services to children and their families.



# CHILD DEATHS IN MANITOBA

## Manitoba Deaths

The Office of the Chief Medical Examiner (OCME) notified the OCA of 162 deaths of Manitoba children occurring in 2012-2013.

## Reviewable Deaths

Child deaths that meet the criteria for special investigation reviews include those where the child, or the child's family, had an open file with a child welfare agency or a file that was closed within one year preceding the child's death.

There were a total of 64 child deaths that met the criteria for review this year. Twenty of those children were in the care of a CFS agency at the time they died, which included 14 children who were medically fragile, premature, or who died from an undetermined cause (including sudden infant death syndrome, or SIDS).

The OCME determines the manner of death of each child according to an established protocol. In the table below we have provided an analysis of the manner of death compared across Manitoba deaths as a whole, reviewable deaths, and child in care deaths. This reporting is unofficial and may differ slightly from the OCME's final determinations.

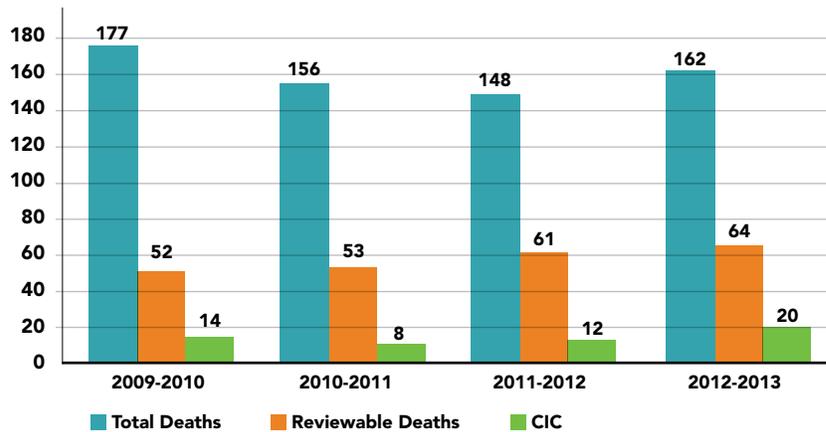
### MANNER OF CHILD DEATH MANITOBA 2012-2013

Manner of Death	Manitoba Deaths		Reviewable Deaths		Child in Care Deaths	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
<b>Natural</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>62%</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>53%</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>50%</b>
Medically Fragile	37		15		8	
Prematurity	47		13		1	
Disease	11		5		1	
Other	5		1		0	
<b>Accidental</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>13%</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>6%</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>5%</b>
Other	5		2		0	
Drowning	2		0		0	
In the Home	2		1		0	
Motor Vehicle	12		1		1	
<b>Suicide</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>11%</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>17%</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>20%</b>
<b>Homicide</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2%</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2%</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>5%</b>
<b>Undetermined</b> (includes SIDS)	<b>21</b>	<b>13%</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>22%</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>20%</b>
<b>Total Deaths</b>	<b>162</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>100%</b>

Note - Numbers may not total 100% due to rounding to the nearest whole number

Reviewable deaths mirror the overall deaths in Manitoba in that most are considered to have occurred naturally. Sixty-nine percent of reviewable deaths were of children who were not in care at the time of their death.

## YEARLY COMPARISON OF REVIEWABLE DEATHS



## REVIEWABLE DEATHS BY AUTHORITY: 2012-2013 (N=64)

	Number	Percentage
General Authority	5	8%
Metis Authority	9	14%
First Nations Northern Authority	30	47%
First Nations Southern Authority	20	31%
<b>Total Cases with CFS Involved</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>100%</b>

## CHILD IN CARE: Legal Status and Manner of Death

Legal Status	Natural	Accidental	Suicide	Homicide	Undetermined	Total
Permanent Ward	4	1	3	1		9
Temporary Ward	-	-	-	-	2	2
VPA	6	-	-	-	-	6
Apprehension	-	-	1	-	2	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>20</b>

# OVERALL THEMES & RECOMMENDATIONS

As we reflect on the past year, we look for progress that has been made on recommendations as well as new insights into how services for children and youth may be improved.

## ASSESSING RISK

Assessing the risk of harm to a child is a fundamental requirement in child protection services, yet we continue to see difficulties in this area of case management.

In 2006, the OCA and the Ombudsman published a joint report entitled, *Strengthen the Commitment: An External Review of the Child Welfare System*.<sup>4</sup> That report, which was sent to the Minister of Family Services and is available on our website, reviewed recommendations contained in more than 250 Section 10 child death reports prepared by the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner (OCME) between 2001-2005. Top concerns included case management and risk assessment, documentation, and proper training.

Concerns continue to be raised with respect to risk assessment, family assessment, staff training and case documentation in relation to the delivery of child welfare services in Manitoba. Case management issues have remained at the top of the list for a number of years. Because case management is the backbone of services, it needs to be an area for continuous quality improvement.

There have been improvements to training in recent years. Agency workers receive training in risk assessment as part of the Child Protection Branch Core Competency program, however, trainers readily acknowledge that this basic training does not create expertise. The concepts of best practice in risk assessment must be supported and modeled on the frontline.

Agencies throughout the province are in the process of implementing Structured Decision-Making™ (SDM) tools, developed by the Children's Research Center in Wisconsin. This model includes a probability of future harm assessment. As we examine 2012 and 2013 SIR cases, we are beginning to see those assessments included on the files we review. We look forward to seeing the positive impact we believe these tools can have when case management and risk assessment are more closely and consistently aligned.

Another factor impacting risk assessment and overall case planning relates to the computer-based information management system that Manitoba child welfare agencies are required to use. The system comprises two distinct applications: the Intake Module (IM) and the Child and Family Services Information System (CFSIS). Together they are known as the Child and Family Services Applications (CFSA).

This technology is intended to provide workers with comprehensive historic and current data on families involved with CFS in order to aid assessment and case planning activities. Agencies are expected to enter up-to-date information on children, youth, and families receiving services so that CFSA case files remain accurate.

<sup>4</sup> Hardy, M., Schibler, B., & Hamilton, I. (2006, September). *Strengthen the commitment: An external review of the child welfare system*. Available: <http://www.childrensadvocate.mb.ca/wp-content/uploads/Strengthen-the-Commitment-September-29-2006.pdf>



## UNDERSTANDING RISK

Although improvements to the system's user interface have been made in recent years, it is difficult to master. Some workers have informed our office that they feel overwhelmed by the way the computer-based information management system has been designed. Training on the system is not uniform across child welfare offices and we have also heard from workers that the necessary Internet connections in remote locations are sometimes unreliable, further hampering the use of this technology. We are also aware of some agencies who are still not using the CFSA system.

The concerning result of these barriers is that detailed child welfare histories are not readily or easily available to workers across the province. This is of particular concern when families move and require subsequent services. Although technology cannot replace professional judgment, it can be a valuable component to the risk assessment process. The lack of a documented family history can leave children and youth facing unacceptable risk.

Suggestions have been raised over the years, and also during the Phoenix Sinclair Inquiry, for improving the CFSA information management system. Various suggestions have been made to improve the way information is collected, stored, and accessed by those providing services to families. Ultimately, there needs to be resolution to the issues that consistently are raised as concerns. Our office regularly reviews situations in which the CFSA system is a factor of concern and we have raised concerns numerous times over the years about lingering connectivity issues in rural and remote communities. Workers should not only be properly trained to use the system, but feel confident in their abilities to do so.

## CASE PLANNING AND SERVICE DELIVERY

Developing a comprehensive case plan and identifying the necessary resources for its implementation is also a core function of child welfare service delivery. This is an area where we continue to see gaps. Regular reviews of the case plan are not consistently completed to evaluate success and make modifications where necessary.

In some situations, clearly needed resources are not identified in the case plan or they are not readily available and this compromises service delivery. We also see instances where children and youth are not involved in developing their case plan or where the plan is not communicated to them in a way they can understand. This contravenes the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Article 12).

**Article 12 (Respect for the views of the child):** When adults are making decisions that affect children, children have the right to say what they think should happen and have their opinions taken into account (Adapted from the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child)

In our *Youth with Complex Needs* (2012) report, we identified a need for a multi-systemic approach to case planning and service delivery. The child welfare system by itself cannot possibly address the health, education, housing and justice issues that will impact the successful development of case planning and implementation. Historically, the many systems in place to support and address family concerns have worked largely in isolation

resulting in fragmented services that are not coordinated for maximum benefit. This is despite the fact that the majority of children, youth, and families we encounter are receiving simultaneous services from multiple sectors.

Effective coordination of services not only makes their delivery smoother, it also ensures that the plan for support responds to all of the needs a family may be facing. When public services act together, it conveys a strong message to families that their well-being is important. Further, when service providers, together with families who know their needs best, collaborate to create a plan of action, success is more likely.

There are examples of success in the area of case planning and service delivery. "Wrap-around" services that address multiple family needs in a coordinated fashion can be found at agencies such as the Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre and Ka Ni Kanichihk, to name just two.

In January 2013, the province partnered with the federal government and local service providers to open a centre that is equipped to assist children navigating the processes of child abuse investigations and the justice system. The centre, part of Tracia's Trust: Manitoba's Child Sexual Exploitation Strategy, is a child-friendly space with comfortable interview rooms and aims to minimize the number of times a child must recount the abuse while evidence is gathered. Service providers are brought to the centre to achieve this, rather than requiring the child to be moved from place to place to progress through the process of reporting and finding support. And although the service chose a name (Winnipeg Children's Advocacy Centre) that has resulted in some public confusion about its relationship to our office, we applaud its organizers and staff for offering a response to children and youth that demonstrates an understanding of the compassion that is so critical when young people are called on to bravely tell their stories of trauma.

More of these progressive programs, as well as improved training and adherence to best practices in the area of case planning across the system and between sectors would improve outcomes for young people in Manitoba.



## CHANGING PATTERNS OF CHILD AND YOUTH SUICIDE

Each year our office tracks the suicide deaths of children and youth. Although the number of suicides appeared to be declining over the past two years, this year showed a return to previous levels. In Manitoba, there were 17 deaths by suicide of young people in 2012-13. Eleven of these young people were involved with child welfare and, thus, those files were assigned for review by OCA special investigators.

Of significant concern, there were four children aged 12 years who died by suicide in Manitoba with two of those deaths fitting the criteria for review. One death occurred in Winnipeg and three occurred in northern communities.

Since September 2008, the OCA has been notified of all child deaths in Manitoba. In the age group of 14 years and younger, we note four deaths by suicide in 2009-2010, three in 2010-2011, four in 2011-2012, and five in 2012-2013. Our office is often asked to comment on our interpretation of the numbers of suicide deaths. However, in order to understand trends at a meaningful level, the view must be longer than a handful of years. We continue to track and analyze these trends and issues related to child and youth suicide and are committed to continuing to offer those insights to youth, stakeholders, policymakers, and the public.



We have also observed a shift over recent years of suicides among female youth outnumbering those of male youth. In Manitoba over the past two years, this trend has continued with more than twice the number of girls dying by suicide compared with boys. All but one of the deaths last year was the result of strangulation. This is also a change from what was previously the norm.

In 2006, the OCA published a report on child deaths in Manitoba called *Honouring Their Spirits*.<sup>5</sup> The report included analysis of certain issues associated with youth suicide, including an established pattern that a majority of young Canadians who died by suicide were male, and although more females attempted suicide, their male counterparts were three times more likely to die by suicide.<sup>6</sup> This is not what our office is currently seeing as we examine suicide deaths of young people in Manitoba.

The changing pattern of suicides that now includes a greater proportion of girls, an increasing trend toward strangulation, and possibly a younger demographic all speak to the need to re-evaluate our approach to youth suicide. These emerging changes may have significant implications for both the development and the delivery of prevention and intervention programs.

Situations that lead to suicide deaths are complex and may include intergenerational trauma related to family violence, addiction, abuse, residential school experience, and loss. An effective approach to prevention of these deaths goes well beyond the scope of a child welfare agency. We have made several recommendations this year in our work that recognize the role of the broader community when it comes to keeping children safe. These recommendations have included engagement of community and organizational leaders, as well as the provincial and federal government, to create a strategy to address various community concerns as well as the adequate resources to address them. In our ongoing efforts to bring these issues to the attention of the wider public, we continue to analyze and track data on suicides and will be presenting some of our findings at the national conference of the Canadian Association for Suicide Prevention in 2013.

<sup>5</sup> Schibler, B., & Newton, J. H. (2006, September). Honouring their spirits: The child death review – A report to the Minister of Family Services and Housing. Manitoba Office of the Children's Advocate, Province of Manitoba. Available: <http://www.childrensadvocate.mb.ca/wp-content/uploads/Child-Death-Review-2006.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

## COMMUNITY STRENGTH THROUGH COLLABORATION

One of the deaths we reviewed this past year is an example where a commendable degree of collaboration had occurred between the family, the agency and the community.

*A few years ago, a community identified the issue of youth suicide as being significant. To address the concern, a committee of stakeholders came together to develop a community response. This committee has been active in suicide prevention work as well as in the development of a protocol for responding to youth in crisis. The committee has consistent representation from mental health, police, education, social service and health authorities.*

*In 2012, an adolescent boy living in this community experienced the tragic loss of his younger sibling. It was a pivotal point in his life leaving him with a significant sense of grief and guilt.*

*In response to the death of his sibling, the boy and his family received support from several agencies in the community including Child and Family Services, crisis response counsellors and mental health professionals. As they grieved, the family continued to receive support to deal with the tragic loss. The community surrounded this family and bolstered supports to respond to their needs. Sadly, despite the dedication of so many in the community, this adolescent was unable to overcome his grief and he died by suicide.*

It is the difficult reality that sometimes, despite hard work and effective collaboration between community members, best efforts cannot prevent all tragedies. The conclusion for survivors should not be that those efforts were wasted, even in the wake of tragedy. Community-based groups, like the one described here, assist untold numbers of individuals and families around the province and can be examples to all of us about the shared responsibility of community-minded care. The success of such groups is most accurately measured by the many children, youth, and families who find assistance and support. Collaboration and cooperation within a community is vital to ensuring that children, youth, and families know about supports available and can access the help they require.



# COMMUNITY



## HOUSING

Article 27 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child outlines a child's right to a safe place to live that meets basic needs. Adequate housing has a direct relationship to the well-being of children and their families. Over the past year, housing has emerged as a growing issue for the families we have seen.

In one situation, two young brothers had to be moved from a long-term placement with extended family due to the presence of mould in the home. Another family experienced chronic transiency due primarily to problems in finding safe, secure housing. In our visits to First Nations communities, numerous housing problems have been identified by community members, including: overcrowding due to insufficient houses to meet the need of the community, lack of foster homes due to housing not meeting the standards required for licensing, and people having to leave the community due to a lack of available housing. In some communities, a lack of sewer and water service in many homes makes it difficult to maintain sanitary conditions necessary to the safety of very young or medically fragile children.

Although housing and homelessness are not issues that the child welfare system can address, it clearly impacts the safety and well-being of children and is a contributing factor to children coming into care and to delays in their return to the care of parents.

Our office is in the process of a literature review regarding homelessness and housing problems as they relate to child welfare. In the coming year, we plan to combine the data we find in the literature with information gathered in this office through case situations and community visits to further examine how housing has an impact in child welfare.

Housing insecurity also occurs due to a lack of suitable placement resources for children in care. Our special report, *Youth with Complex Needs* (2012), which examined the living situations of a sample of 289 children in care with multiple high needs, revealed that running behaviour (formerly known as being AWOL, now labeled as UA, or unplanned absence) was a concern for 108 of the youth (p. 78). Further, 49% were waiting for a specialized placement that could meet their needs. Almost one-third of these children had experienced placement breakdown multiple times (p. 83). The lack of a suitable living environment for these children and youth compounds their existing difficulties. As mentioned in our earlier discussion of this report, our recommendations with respect to youth with complex needs have been presented to numerous stakeholders and we are hopeful government will develop potential plans for their implementation.

# FINANCIAL REPORT

Salaries and Benefits = \$2,435,854.42

Total Operating Expenses = \$733,811.90

## OFFICE OF THE CHILDREN'S ADVOCATE STAFF TEAM

**Darlene MacDonald** – Children's Advocate

**Bonnie Kocsis** – Deputy Children's Advocate (until June 2012)

**Corey La Berge** – Deputy Children's Advocate (began January 2013)

### Management

**Patsy Addis Brown** – Manager, Special Projects (2000-2012)\*

**Angie Balan** – Manager, Quality Assurance

**Ainsley Krone** – Manager, Communications, Research, and Public Education

**Kirstin Magnusson** – Interim Program Manager, Advocacy and Intake Services

**Shelagh Marchenski** – Program Manager, Special Investigation Review Unit

**Patty Sansregret** – Manager, Special Projects

**Cynthia Steranka** – Manager, Administration and Finance

### Staff

**Sarah Arnal** – Advocacy Officer

**Kevin Barkman** – Special Investigator

**Holly Bartko** – Administrative Assistant

**Vanessa Bodie** – Senior Clerk (until January 2013)

**Carolyn Burton** – Senior Clerk

**Bob Christle** – Special Investigator (until May 2012)

**Debra De Silva** – Intake Assessment Officer

**Roni Dhaliwal** – Special Investigator (until May 2012)

**Margherita Gagliardi** – Special Investigator

**Dawn Gair** – Intake Assessment Officer

**Justine Grain** – Special Investigator

**Cathy Hudek** – Special Investigator

**Tanis Hudson** – Special Investigator

**Doug Ingram** – Advocacy Officer

**Holly Johnson** – Administrative Assistant (until July 2012)

**Gerald Krosney** – Advocacy Officer

**Joanne Lysak** – Special Investigator

**Whitney Moore** – Special Investigator

**Thelma Morrisseau** – Advocacy Officer

**Rosie O'Connor** – Advocacy Officer

**Carolyn Parsons** – Advocacy Officer

**Jennifer Rentz-Wright** – Special Investigator

**Lynda Schellenberg** – Special Investigator

**Reji Thomas** – Administrative Assistant

**Barb Tobin** – Special Investigator (until May 2012)

**Denise Wadsworth** – Intake Assessment Officer

**Paula Zimrose** – Intake Assessment Officer

\*Long-serving staff member, Patsy Addis Brown, passed away in 2013.

She is sadly missed.

### Co-op, Practicum, and STEP Students

**Stacey Morin-Banfield** – University of Manitoba

**Shimon Segal** – University of Manitoba

**Bethany Zeitner** – Lakehead University

## SPECIAL INVESTIGATION REVIEW ADVISORY COMMITTEE

We wish to offer our sincerest thanks to the committed individuals who continue to support the work of our office by lending their professional expertise in many areas relevant to our work with children and youth.

<b>Mr. Scott Amos</b>	Social Development Operational Specialist, Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada
<b>Mr. Alem Asghedom</b>	Instructor, Inner City Social Work Program, University of Manitoba
<b>Ms. Marie Christian</b>	Program Coordinator, VOICES: Manitoba's Youth in Care Network
<b>Dr. Charles Ferguson</b>	Director, Child Protection Centre
<b>Dr. Don Fuchs</b>	Professor, Faculty of Social Work, University of Manitoba
<b>Ms. Pamela Jackson</b>	Therapist, Trainer, and Consultant
<b>Mr. Corey La Berge</b>	Accommodation Counsel for Youth Living with FASD, Legal Aid Manitoba (until January 2013)
<b>Ms. Margaret Lavallee</b>	Elder, University of Manitoba
<b>Dr. Peter Markesteyn</b>	Former Chief Medical Examiner
<b>Mr. Peter Rogers</b>	Senior Advisor, Heath Canada



### COURAGE

Emotions took over  
I ain't getting younger, I'm getting older  
My life story is placed in a folder  
Time keeps ticking in my mind;  
Lights flicker  
Through the darkness apart from this  
Some days I look in the mirror and tell myself to be strong  
One day these thoughts will be gone

Emotions took over  
I ain't getting younger, I'm getting older

They thought they saw me then,  
But they see me now,  
People look at me and see I'm just a normal human being  
Looking for a happy ending to call my new beginning

Emotions are trying to take over  
But I'm an individual with potential

Feeling free to be who I want to be,  
It's all part of relativity  
They can try to chase me  
But they'll never catch me

– submitted by a youth, C.O.

## THE OFFICE OF THE CHILDREN'S ADVOCATE

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